

3. Revelation: A True Picture of Jesus

Text: Revelation 1:9-20

Ps. Johnny Lesnik

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Introduction:

- ▶ In John 12 we read of some Greek guys that came up to Philip with a request: *“Sir,”* they said, *“we would like to see Jesus” (v.21)*. And I trust that this is also the desire of our hearts here today, to see Jesus, and so it should be because a glimpse of the real Jesus is what will keep you moving forward. When you catch a true glimpse of the real Jesus, everything else will diminish in importance. And do you realise that we will see Him? Whether in the Rapture or whether we die, a time is coming when we will be face to face with Jesus.
- ▶ Now, what do you think He will look like? Most of us have in our mind what we think Jesus looked like when He was on earth for 3½ years. Then we have in our mind what He looked like in his post-resurrection appearance when they recognized him but sometimes they didn't, how He could appear through walls and then vanish. But the description in the Bible of what Jesus looks like now is not his earthly appearance, nor his post-resurrection appearance... it is his post-ascension appearance, after He went back to heaven where
- ▶ He is right now. Today, we will see **A TRUE PICTURE OF JESUS**: Read *Revelation 1:9-20*.
- ▶ Now, I said to you a few weeks ago that verse 19 is the key to understanding the entire book of Revelation. There are three parts to it. If you want to understand it, you have to have this key to unlock it. First of all there is the past. *“Write the things that you have seen,”* Jesus said. What did John just see? He saw a vision of Jesus that we'll be talking about today. Then Jesus said, *“Write the things which are”* - that's the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. *“Then, write the things which shall be hereafter”* – that's future stuff that begins in chapter 4 to the end of the book. Today we're going to look at that first section in its entirety, the past, the things John saw.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE VISION

- ▶ **1. The physical circumstances “Face to Face with Jesus”**
First of all there were some physical circumstances we should know about when John saw Jesus. And what were they? Well, look at the surroundings of John... it says in *verse 9, “I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”* So we know that John
- ▶ where John was when he received this vision. I shared with you earlier the Roman Emperor Domitian, had John boiled in oil. These Roman emperors had colossal egos and Domitian was one of the first ones who made it law throughout all the Roman Empire that every year every citizen of the Roman Empire must burn incense to him and must declare that Domitian was Lord of the Universe. John, of course, and many other Christians didn't do that. Many of them were put to death. Foxes Book of Martyrs records that they boiled John in oil but he did not die and escaped by a miracle.
- ▶ They had a little law that if you tried to execute somebody and they lived, you could not execute them again; no double jeopardy, you might say. Instead, they took John to the island of Patmos. When you think about him living on an island... folks, it was not Gilligan's Island! It was not some tropical paradise. In John's day, the Romans were using the island as a penal colony for convicts.
- ▶ Why did Domitian put John there? Because John could no longer preach from there. He couldn't go around preaching the good news of Jesus Christ if he was exiled to this island. John was exiled in an effort by the authorities to silence him. He was there because of the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ - but what was the result?

▶ They wanted to shut him up, but there on that island he is given the greatest revelation of Jesus Christ ever! That ought to be an encouragement to all our hearts today: was John discouraged out on that island? I'm sure, as a human with a nature like ours, he was. Was he depressed? Well, I don't know about that, but I'm sure he was near to it. He probably thought at times that his ministry was over, and his usefulness for God was behind him - but little did he know that the best was yet to be. The pinnacle and the climax of his whole ministry was ahead of him. Can I say to you who are discouraged servants of the Lord: that is always the case for the saints of God. No matter what you have experienced in your past, and no matter how useless you feel you are in the present, the best is always yet to come - even if that means death itself. Things can only get better for the people of God!

Notice what John says in *verse 9, "I am your companion in suffering."* John knew the Christians were suffering and were persecuted. Every Christian who didn't burn incense to the Roman Emperor was suffering or being put to death. He says, *"I'm suffering, you're suffering, we are partners in suffering."* It is a heresy that is being taught that says Christians never suffer. I don't know where they get that teaching, but they certainly don't get it from the Bible because Christians do suffer. I just want you to briefly look at *chapter 2:10, "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."* Listen, I know we don't like to hear this kind of stuff in our modern Christianity, but the reality is that Jesus Himself promised that we would suffer, and Paul also described that we must go through much suffering to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Of course, James 1 encourages us that such trials and tribulations develops patience and Christian maturity in our lives. So, if you do an honest study of suffering in the New Testament, you will find that it is God's plan is that we should endure trial and trouble and tribulation as a pre-requisite for reigning in the kingdom of God in a near future day. Now, ▶ this really throws the cat amongst the 'prosperity, health & wealth' preachers of today... those preachers who tell us that we ought not to be poor, we ought not to suffer in any sense... the Bible actually teaches the opposite of that:

▶ *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs-- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Rom. 8:16-17)*

▶ *"If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12)*

▶ In other words, **there will be no crown without the cross** - for Christ the Saviour, the cross must come before the crown, and it is no different for us, His servants. It is the suffering, and then the glory: that is God's order.

John was effectively in the Alcatraz of the day, out on the Isle of Patmos... but why? For stealing? For beating his wife? For assaulting someone? For damaging someone's property? No!! Verse 9 tells us he is there *'for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ'*.

▶ When you make a stand for Jesus Christ, don't be expecting for the world to make you a superstar, but rather to persecute you. That word 'testimony' is very interesting, it literally is the word 'witness', and in the Greek it is the basis for our English word 'martyr'. So this testimony, this witness that John is engaged in, and indeed the first century saints of God were all engaged in, it doesn't just involve sweat and tears, but it incorporates the very shedding of their life's blood. Now, that poses some serious questions for us, doesn't it? How is our witness for Christ? Do we even shed a tear? Do we even break a sweat in an effort to see others won for Christ? I almost feel ashamed of my efforts of winning souls for Christ when compared to John and the other saints of the first century. We want to entertain people into the kingdom of God today, these folk were literally dying to get them in!

▶ 2. The spiritual circumstances

Those were the physical circumstances but there were some spiritual circumstances as well. He says in **verse 10, "On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit."** This is the first time the phrase "Lord's Day" is found in the Bible. We assume it is on Sunday. The Jews worshiped on Saturday but the Christians began to worship on the first day and we believe this is the reference to the "Lord's Day." Writers of the early church began to refer to the "Lord's Day" as the Christian Sabbath, but we need to understand something about that: it is a Sabbath in that it is a day of rest when we gather for the purpose of worship... but it is not the same as the Jewish Sabbath with all its Old Testament laws and regulations because that has indeed passed away and was nailed to the Cross of Jesus Christ.

▶ John says, **"I was in the Spirit"**. Let's take a closer look at that statement and consider two things: First, if you ever want to have a glimpse of Christ in glory, you need to be in the Spirit in a general sense. That means that we need to be walking in unclouded fellowship with Him and that way we will be in a position to receive divine communication - in other words, **we need to be near to hear**. I think that's what David meant when he wrote in **Psalm 25:14, 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.'** You see, they tried to isolate the apostle John from communion with Christian people, but they didn't realise that they could not isolate him from communication with the Christ! That's a wonderful truth! Do you realise that as a Christian you can be in two places at once? Look, here was John on the Isle of Patmos, but he is also dwelling in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He is imprisoned by the Romans, and yet he's also at the feet of the Lord Jesus. And the truth of the matter is that sometimes the darker your circumstances, the greater the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ will be.

Secondly, the specific meaning of being **"in the Spirit"** here, is that John was carried, beyond the normal sense of things, into a state where God could reveal supernaturally to him the content of this book of Revelation. This kind of thing also happened to Ezekiel, Peter and Paul. So, those are the circumstances of the vision that he had.

II. THE CONTENT OF THE VISION

▶ 1. The position of Jesus (v12-13)

Notice the content of the vision. What did John see in this vision of Jesus in the book of Revelation? John did not look at some guy who looks like one of those Jesus characters from a Jesus film. What he saw was a vision of the post ascension Jesus. Notice the position of the Lord, where he was standing. **"I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me and when I turned I saw seven lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone 'like the son of man.'"** John turned around and what he saw were seven lampstands with candles and he saw someone 'like the son of man'. This is really interesting because it is the exact expression that is used in the book of **Daniel 7:13, "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, [One] like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him."** John was describing here exactly who Daniel was describing... Jesus, the Son of Man, the Son of God, God the Son!

▶ Notice how he describes the way he was dressed. **"He was dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet."** That was what only priests wore; no one else wore robes that went all the way down to their feet. A priest was the only one who kept his feet covered with his robe and so it was a picture of the priestly role of Jesus. Then he said, **"He had a golden sash across his chest"** that was the signal and the sign of a judge and so we see Jesus is not only priest but He is judge. So that's the position of the Lord standing in these golden lampstands, which represent these seven churches. What that means is Jesus is in the midst of his Church even today as the High Priest Judge. This is the main part of the message.

▶ 2. The picture of Jesus (vv14-16)

Look at the picture of the Lord. In the entire Bible there are only two records of the physical description of Jesus... Daniel 10 and Revelation 1! What do you think Jesus looked like when he was on His earthly ministry? Well, if you believe those Jesus movies then Jesus had long brown hair, real fair looking skin, big blue eyes and he looks so handsome. But I got to be honest... I've seen people from Israel and I've never seen a Jew that looked like that! Sometimes we think Jesus was a real handsome man but the Bible says just the opposite... *"He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, [There is] no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isa. 53:2)*. He was just an ordinary looking guy. There was nothing physically attractive about Him but when you see Jesus face to face either at the rapture of the church or when you die and stand before the Christ, what do you think He is going to look like? Well, I believe He's going to look exactly like He looked when John saw Him as He is described here:

▶ (1) His Head and Hair

There are seven descriptions given of Him. First, notice His hair and His head in *verse 14*. *"His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow."* This is a picture of wisdom, of holiness and purity. John said, *"When I turned around, I looked and I saw this man. He was like the son of man and his hair and his head were white as snow and white as wool,"* signifying purity.

▶ (2) His Eyes

Next, notice his eyes. It says, *"His eyes were a blazing fire."* These are similes. It didn't say his eyes were on fire it says, *"His eyes were like a blazing fire."* This seems to speak of His righteous judgement. Those eyes of His can see into the depths of our hearts where no other eye can see. Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 5 that one day *"we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ"* and in 1 Cor. 3 that the Christian's works are going to be judged *"with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work."* Where is that fire going to come from? Could it be all Jesus has to do just look at us and that fire will try our works?

▶ (3) His Feet

Next it says, *"His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace."* It doesn't mean his feet were bronze, it just says, "When I looked at his feet, they were like glowing white hot bronze." Now, bronze in the Old Testament is a figure of judgement - that's why you've got a bronze altar on which there was a sacrifice for sin. God was depicting judgement for sin on that lamb. So, here in these bronze feet we have a picture of how this High Priest Judge is standing steady and is chastising, disciplining and judging His church through this vision.

▶ (4) His Voice

"His voice was like the sound of rushing waters." Have you ever been to Niagara Falls? I've never been but people who have say that you can hear it long before you ever see it, because the noise of the cascading water is so loud. This also matches up with Psalm 29 and Ezekiel 43 that also talk about the voice of God being very loud. This speaks of Christ's authority: no other voice needs to be heard by the churches, other than Christ's – boy, do we need to hear that today!

▶ (5) His Right Hand

In His right hand there were seven stars. We know from verse 20 that these seven stars represent the seven angels or the seven messengers of the seven churches. The word *angelos*, translated angel, can also mean human messenger. So it can be possibly refer to the actual pastors of the churches or it might mean the angels that are over each church. In any instance, the lesson we get from this is that Christ is in control of the churches, He holds them in His hand. And in the next number of weeks we're going to see in the seven letters to the seven churches that He has some scathing criticism of them as their High Priest Judge - and yet, with all that, they are secure in His right hand!

▶ (6) His Mouth

"His voice his mouth was like a two-edged sword." What does that mean? This is the Word of God that when He speaks, it cuts in both directions. That's what the Bible says in **Hebrews 4:12** *"The word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword."* When Jesus comes back, as it describes in Revelation 19, that's the only weapon that's going to be needed at the Battle of Armageddon. They're not going to need 50mm machine guns, icb missiles, armoured cars, or an FBI unit. The only weapon used at the real Armageddon is the two-edged sword that comes out of the mouth of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. However, we need to understand that here it is used in the sense of judging His church. Why? Well, listen to **1 Peter 4:17**, *"for it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"* Now, please don't misunderstand me, the churches are being judged here with the purpose of purification and reward, but the nations of unbelievers will be judged with the purpose of punishment. We will never be punished to condemnation because Christ was judged for our sins on the cross, but here it's the matter of purification and reward, and being fit to stand before Him. This is important to God, and for us.

▶ (7) His Face

His face is described as brilliant radiance in **verse 16**. *"His face was like the sun shining in all of its brilliance."* John caught an earlier glimpse of this with Peter and James when they saw Jesus being transfigured before them on the Mount (Matt. 17) where Jesus' face shone like the sun. Paul also had a glimpse of this in Acts 9 when on his way to Damascus he saw Jesus. Paul said there was such a bright light; he couldn't even look at it. He said it was a light brighter than the midday sun. Then he said there was a voice. The sound was like thunder it was such a loud sound he fell to the ground.

Folks, I understand Jesus to look like this right now. I thought for many years before I read this passage of scripture that when I see Jesus He would be flesh-toned and brown haired and blue eyed and I was just going to go up to Him face to face and just sort of look Him in the eye and shake hands with Him, hug Him and say, *"Jesus, I am so glad that I am here now!"* But the more I've read and understood this passage, the more I know just how wrong I was. His "Shekinah" glory will have to be shielded or veiled or it would literally kill us. Even the angels in Isaiah 6 have to cover their faces from His glory!

▶ III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE VISION

So, what happened as a result of what John saw in the book of Revelation when he saw Jesus? I suppose that the closest earthly friend Jesus of Nazareth had was the apostle, John. When they were at the last supper, the Bible says John was reclining against the chest of Jesus. They were that close. When Jesus died on the cross, he looked down and the only disciple as far as we know had the courage to stand at the cross was John and Jesus had such a close relationship with John that from the cross he said, *"John, take care of my mother. Mary you let John care for you like your only son."*

Tradition tells us John was the youngest of the twelve disciples and was only in his early twenties when Jesus called him. This is about 90 A.D. when all of this is taking place. We can date the book of Revelation about 90 A.D. So for 60 years Jesus and John were separated. How do you think John reacted when after 60 years he sees his Lord, the one he has been preaching about, the one he has been praying to all these years? For some reason I used to picture in my mind that it's going to be like one of these shampoo commercials☺ Where you have two people out in a field and they are running toward each other and the music is playing and it is in slow motion, freshly shampooed hair bouncing all the way. Then finally they meet each other and they embrace and they go around and around and around as the music plays. That's kind of how I pictured Jesus and John would get back together. WRONG!

I want you to see how John reacted when he saw Jesus why? Because I think it is the same way you and I are going to react when we see Jesus. *“When I saw him,”* John says, *“I fell at his feet as though dead.”* If you don’t think Jesus is the holy God now, you will then! If you think you’re going to slip up to him and give him a high five and say, *“Man, I’m so glad to see you, Jesus!”* you’re wrong! I imagine every one of us is going to react the same way John did. We’re going to fall at his feet. Not because we want to worship Him, but because, like John, we will be so overwhelmed. We’re going to collapse because of the glory and the holiness and the majesty of whom Jesus is. In fact, John must have wondered, *“Who is this? Who is this? It doesn’t look like the Jesus that I knew and loved. Who is this?”* but it was Jesus all right because I want you to see what happened as a result of the vision.

▶ Now, look what happened: The Lord Jesus reaches out His right-hand and touches him... this is so powerful! The hand in which He holds the church is also outstretched to an individual saint of God who needs His touch. Does that help you today? It helps me! He’s not too busy to take my needs into account, and He says to John and He says to us: *‘Fear not’* - why then should we fear?

Some of you are lonely. Some of you are confused. Some of you are troubled. Jesus is there to reach out and touch you just like he did John. He says, *“Don’t be afraid. I am the First and the Last.”* He says, *“I am the Alpha and the Omega.”* He says, “I am the same one that I was before and that I am right now.” Then he says in verse 18, *“I am the Living One: I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever and ever!”* And he says, *“I hold the keys of death and Hades.”* He says, *“I’m the one who controls this thing. I’m the one who keeps the keys to the grave. I’m the one who keeps the keys to Hell to Hades. I’m in control of death. Don’t you fear anything, John! I’m in control!”* So he comforts him and he can comfort you too.

CONCLUSION

▶ **Illustration:** A father was trying to get peace to read his copy of the newspaper. The problem was, every time he settled down with his cup of tea his little girl kept on asking him questions. So he came up with a bright idea, and off his coffee table he lifted a missionary magazine. He ripped a page of a map of the world out of it, and ripped it into several pieces, and then said: *‘Dear, I’ve got something for you to do, it’s a little puzzle. Here’s a map of the world, see if you can put the jigsaw puzzle together’,* and he sat down again to his newspaper. In a few minutes she was back - and he couldn’t believe it, she had it all done! He asked her: *‘How did you do it so fast?’*, and like a flash she replied, *‘Well, Dad, it was easy. I found a picture of the Lord Jesus on the other side, and I knew when I had Him in the right place the whole world would be all right’.*

▶ Church, do you have Jesus in the right place in your life? I hope you’ve caught a glimpse of who Jesus is today. It is so easy for our vision of Christ to become distracted. The churches in John’s day and also in our day are in danger of losing sight of Christ. That is why those seven churches needed a revelation of Him... and so do we.